

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 14, 2013

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Omaha youth receives Governor's Points of Light award for volunteer service with English language learners

Lincoln, Neb. – Yesenia Rodriguez, Omaha South High Magnet School student stands out as a volunteer and a leader due to her incredible selflessness. Today, she was honored by Governor Heineman and First Lady Sally Ganem with the Governor's Points of Light youth award at a ceremony in the Warner Chamber at the State Capitol in Lincoln. Yesenia's upbringing has largely influenced her desire to serve others. During her childhood, she faced two obstacles: poverty and a language barrier. She understands the frustration of those who cannot speak English. Yesenia's first day of elementary school in Omaha was so traumatizing that she still remembers her helplessness as she tried to communicate with others.

With the help of the Dual Language program at Omaha South High Magnet School, Yesenia has gracefully overcome the language barrier. Now, she serves others in her former position by volunteering at an English Language Learners class for three nights per week during the school year. Yesenia fills a role that the South Omaha community desperately needs; responsible, educated, bilingual volunteers who communicate effectively and earn the trust of native Spanish speakers. Jessie Gotsdiner, AmeriCorps member, who nominated Yesenia and served as her College Possible coach said, "Often, in the Omaha community people say that Latinos do not even attempt to learn English, but Yesenia works hard to correct this stereotype."

Although Yesenia's family continues to survive on a meager income, she does not let this fact discourage her. Instead, she has served other low-income individuals by volunteering at the library, two hours each Saturday. Again, Yesenia addresses a community need, with recent budget cuts, local libraries now rely more heavily on volunteers like her.

Yesenia Rodriguez's service to the community does not stop here, and her leadership will only continue to grow in the future. In fact, she has worked with her College Possible coach to earn five scholarships, including the Susan Buffett Thompson scholarship. She will attend the University of Nebraska-Omaha and will be the first in her family to graduate from college. She is truly an outstanding student leader.

The Governor's Points of Light awards are sponsored by ServeNebraska and presented quarterly in recognition of volunteers who give their time, talent and energy to help Nebraskans build stronger communities. To nominate a youth, adult or group who have made a difference through volunteerism and community service, visit the ServeNebraska website at www.serve.nebraska.gov. The next nomination deadline is September 15, 2013.

ServeNebraska pursues its mission of mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through volunteering, collaboration and national service programs.

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